

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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U.S. to Review Security Procedures After Detroit Airline Incident

By Michael Bowman
VOA News

The Obama administration is reviewing U.S. terror monitoring procedures after a Nigerian man attempted to blow up an airliner as it approached the city of Detroit. Administration officials say the suspect's name had been entered into a U.S. security database, but had not been added to a "no-fly" list.

In the wake of Friday's foiled terror plot, President Obama has requested two reviews of U.S. security procedures. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs spoke on ABC's "This Week" program. "First, on our watch-listing procedures: Did the [U.S.] government do everything it could have with the information it had, understanding that these procedures are several years old? Did we do what we need to with that information? Second, obviously we have to review our detection capabilities. The president has asked the Department of Homeland Security to answer the very real question about how somebody with something as dangerous as PETN [plastic explosive] could have gotten onto a plane in Amsterdam," he said.

U.S. authorities have charged the suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, with transporting and attempting to detonate explosives aboard an airliner. The suspect flew from Amsterdam to the United States, and is believed to have hidden plastic explosives inside his clothing.

Passenger and witness Melinda Dennis said, "Right when we were about to land, there was some commotion in the back, and from what we could tell there was a gentleman who had some sort of device on him that caused him to catch on fire. They put out the fire, brought him up front where they stripped him down to make sure he had nothing else."

The suspect suffered burns and has received medical attention in Michigan, where he is being held.

U.S. officials confirm they had advance knowledge of the suspect. But Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said that knowledge did not rise to the level of banning him from flying or entering the United States. "There are different types of databases, and there was simply throughout the law enforcement community never information that would put this individual on a 'no-fly' list," she said.

Napolitano also appeared on ABC. She says the suspect's possible ties to terrorist groups are under investigation, but there is no indication that Friday's bombing attempt

was part of a larger plot.

According to Nigerian officials, the suspect's father had discussed concerns about his son's radical religious views with U.S. authorities in Nigeria before the attack.

U.S. congressional leaders have promised probes of the incident. If convicted, the suspect could face 20 years in prison as well as a fine.

Iranian Demonstrators Have Admiration of the World, President Obama Says

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama says the Iranian government has an international obligation to respect the rights of its people, and he joined the international community in strongly condemning the "violent and unjust suppression" of demonstrators who have been voicing opposition to their government since the country's disputed June 12 presidential election.

Speaking December 28 in Kaneohe, Hawaii, where he and his family are vacationing, the president said the United States and other free nations around the world stand with individuals who seek their universal rights.

"What's taking place within Iran is not about the United States or any other country; it's about the Iranian people, and their aspirations for justice and a better life for themselves," Obama said, adding that the decision by Iran's leaders to govern "through fear and tyranny" will not make the aspirations of their people go away.

"I'm confident that history will be on the side of those who seek justice," the president said. He repeated some of his December 10 remarks to the Nobel Prize committee in Oslo, Norway, that "it's telling when governments fear the aspirations of their own people more than the power of any other nation."

The demonstrations have been ongoing since incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in June despite opposition charges of fraud. Violence increased December 27, which coincided with the Shiite Muslim holy day of Ashura. According to news reports, many demonstrators have been detained or injured, and some were killed by Iranian security forces.

"For months, the Iranian people have sought nothing more than to exercise their universal rights. Each time they have done so, they have been met with the iron fist of brutality, even on solemn occasions and holy days," President Obama said.

"Each time that has happened, the world has watched

with deep admiration for the courage and the conviction of the Iranian people, who are part of Iran's great and enduring civilization," he said.

The president also called for "the immediate release of all who have been unjustly detained," and said the United States and other countries will "continue to bear witness to the extraordinary events" taking place in Iran.

At the State Department, spokesman Ian Kelly told reporters December 28 that the United States remains willing to peacefully engage with Iran's rulers in an effort to "try and allay our concerns about the peaceful nature of their nuclear program."

However, he expressed concern over the violence being perpetrated against Iranians who are trying to exercise their "peaceful democratic right to self-expression," and said that along with engagement with the Iranian government, the Obama administration will also continue to "speak out in support of those who are out there trying to exercise their democratic rights."

State Dept. on Trial Verdict of Chinese Activist Liu Xiaobo

United States calls for Liu's immediate release

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
For Immediate Release
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STATEMENT BY MARK TONER, ACTING
SPOKESMAN

Trial Verdict of Chinese Activist Liu Xiaobo

The United States was deeply concerned to learn that well-known Chinese democracy activist Liu Xiaobo was found guilty of "incitement to subvert state power." We also were concerned that requests by Mr. Liu's wife, the U.S. Embassy and other diplomatic missions to attend the trial were denied. Punishing people for peacefully expressing their political views violates the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China has signed.

Mr. Liu has already spent a year in detention while Chinese authorities carried out the investigation of his case. As we have expressed repeatedly, we call on the Government of China to release him immediately and to respect the rights of all Chinese citizens to peacefully express their political views.

Thailand Urged to Halt Expulsion of Laotian Hmong Population

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration urges Thailand to suspend its forced repatriation of ethnic Hmong refugees to Laos, describing the action as a "serious violation" of international humanitarian principles.

"Both the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Royal Thai Government have deemed many of them in need of protection because of the threats they might face in Laos," State Department spokesman Ian Kelly said in a December 27 statement.

Many thousands of Hmong fled Laos to Thailand and other countries beginning in 1975 after the Pathet Lao movement took power. The Hmong backed U.S. forces fighting in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict of the 1960s and 1970s. They fear persecution because they also fought to prevent the communist Pathet movement from seizing power in Laos.

Thailand has described the Hmong as "economic migrants" rather than political refugees. On December 28, it sent soldiers armed with shields and batons to begin forcing 4,000 Hmong inhabitants of the camp in Phetchabun province onto buses bound for the Laotian border. According to news reports, international aid workers and the media were prevented from accessing the camp, and mobile phone service to the camp was shut off during the operation.

Spokesman Kelly said U.S. officials "deeply regret this serious violation of the international humanitarian principles that Thailand has long been known for championing."

He urged the government of Laos to treat any returning Hmong humanely, allow international monitors to have access to them, and facilitate resettlement opportunities for eligible returnees.

"We will remain engaged in this important humanitarian issue," Kelly said.

U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres also called for a halt to the forced repatriations on December 24, saying some of the refugees have international protection needs.

"In accordance with international law, Thailand has the responsibility and international obligation to ensure that any return of recognized refugees or other persons in needs of international protection to their country of origin

is undertaken on a strictly voluntary basis," Guterres said. "To proceed otherwise would not only endanger the protection of the refugees but set a very grave international example."

Thailand came under international criticism earlier in 2009 when a group of Rohingya refugees from Burma accused Thai military personnel of beating them and sending them out to sea on boats without motors or adequate food and water supplies.

South Asian Economies Emerge from Global Financial Crisis

By Anjana Pasricha
VOA News

Most South Asian economies are recovering from the global financial crisis, and starting to register brisk growth. The recovery has been especially swift in India, the region's biggest and fastest-growing economy.

As the year draws to a close, the overall mood in India is optimistic. Businesses are planning new investments, consumers are buying new cars and homes, and stock markets are reaching their highest level in a year and a half.

Policy makers are expecting the economy to rise by 7.5 percent to 8 percent during the current financial year. That is far higher than forecasters predicted at the start of the year, when the global recession had sharply slowed growth.

Economists say India's economic recovery has been faster than expected. They say the world's second-fastest-growing economy fared better than most others because India's banking sector was unaffected by the credit crisis. And they say the economy, which relies more on domestic consumption rather than exports, was not badly hit by the downturn in the West. A widespread drought also failed to make much impact, because most of India's growth comes from its services and manufacturing sector.

Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee says he is encouraged by the steady growth in recent months, and is confident of an even better performance in the near future.

"The target of growth of 9 to 10 percent, which we have dreamt for a very long period of time, is now within our reach, and we shall have to achieve that," he said.

The news was also good in neighboring Sri Lanka. At the start of the year, the global financial crisis and the long military conflict with Tamil Tiger rebels had slowed the economy. Foreign exchange reserves had dwindled. But the war's end in May and the return of peace have rejuvenated economic activity.

Domestic trade has expanded as the army has opened a key highway to the war-torn north. New hotels are being built and old ones renovated to accommodate tourists who are flocking back to the island nation's beaches. The stock market, spurred by a surge in foreign investment, doubled during the year.

The Central Bank says it expects growth to increase to 6 percent in 2010, compared to 3.5 percent this year.

Officials in Bangladesh say the nation's economy has hardly been affected by the global recession. They are hoping to achieve 6 percent growth in this fiscal year. The optimism comes despite a slowdown in exports of ready-made garments, which is one of the country's main industries. The International Monetary Fund says the Bangladesh economy will continue to grow steadily, but its dependence on exports means the pace will depend on recovery in Western countries.

South Asia is one of the world's most populous regions. It is also home to millions of poor people, and economists say only high rates of growth can pull these people out of poverty.

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